

## Tough Guy - Andrew Jackson and the Battle for the South

By Toni Lee Robinson

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Andrew Jackson had to be tough right from the start. He never knew his father. A few weeks before Andrew was born, his father was killed in an accident. Andrew's mother Elizabeth worked hard to raise him and his two older brothers.

Andrew Jackson was ten years old as the Revolutionary War began. At thirteen, he worked as a courier in the Continental Army. He was captured by the enemy. As a prisoner, Jackson was ordered to clean a British officer's boots. He refused. Enraged, the officer raised his sword and struck the boy with it. The blade sliced his cheek open and cut his hand to the bone. All his life, Jackson bore the scars from this incident.



Andrew's brother Robert was also a prisoner of war. While in the hands of the British, both the brothers were struck by smallpox, a deadly disease. Robert died shortly after the two were freed. Andrew's mother caught the disease from her sons and died. His oldest brother had been killed early in the war. At fourteen, Andrew Jackson was alone in the world. His anger toward the British hardened into hatred.

Though he was an orphan, the young Jackson made a life for himself. First, he tried working as a tradesman. Finally, he settled on the study of law. Later, he was elected to Congress for the new state of Tennessee. He moved on to serve as a Tennessee Supreme Court judge. In 1802 he became major general of the state's militia.

During this time, Jackson was involved in a dispute arising from a duel. The squabble escalated into a gunfight. A bullet shattered the bone in Jackson's left arm. Doctors said the arm would have to be cut off, but Jackson refused. The bullet and bone shards remained in his arm. They would stay there through the next twenty years.

Meanwhile, things were happening in Jackson's territory, the southwestern U.S. In the midst of the country's war with Britain, the area had its own unique problems. The Louisiana Purchase had added vast lands to the U.S. They were, however, largely unknown. Spain still claimed Florida. Natives of the Creek tribe held a great deal of territory. They spread out from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic, through most of present day Georgia and Alabama.

Though cut off from the rest of America, New Orleans was an important city in the young nation. Many ships loaded with U.S. goods came and went from her ports. The trade was a vital part of the U.S. economy. An exotic blend of people made the city and its nearby regions home. French, African, Spanish, Native American, and white American people lived in the bayou country. It was a lively jumble of cultures and ideas.

As the second war with Britain began, this mixture of people became cause for concern among U.S. officials. The British had made use of uncertain loyalties in the region. They planned to take New Orleans for their own. Alliance with Spain gave them an opening into Florida. Both nations made use of hostility toward the U.S. among native peoples.

The Creek tribe feared the American presence. The U.S. had boldly proclaimed its desire to own the tribe's lands. White settlements pushed into Creek territory. Some of the Creeks rose up against American settlers. Their goal was to drive the whites out. In Alabama, 250 settlers were killed by a band of Creeks called the Red Sticks.

Andrew Jackson had gathered volunteers, mostly from Tennessee and Kentucky. Jackson and his roughhewn frontiersmen dealt swiftly with the Creek uprising. The final battle left 800 Creek warriors dead. Others escaped to Florida, but the Creek Nation was broken. The tribe was forced to cede much of its land to the U.S. Jackson was promoted from the state militia to Brigadier General in the regular army.

As the War of 1812 went on, British threat in the Gulf area increased. U.S. officials looked to Jackson for military clout. He was asked to bring his troops to Mississippi. When they got there, Jackson was told to disband his unit. They weren't needed after all, officials claimed. The General refused to cut his Tennessee troops loose so many

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miles from home. Instead, he turned them around and marched them back.

Dealing with the official bungling may have made Jackson a bit grumpy. His tight-lipped discipline on the march back to Tennessee led his men to compare him to the iron-hard wood of a hickory tree. From then on, Jackson was known as "Old Hickory." His unyielding will and "tough guy" strength would show themselves often in the coming days.

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## Questions

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1. What events might have contributed to the toughness of Andrew Jackson's character?

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Andrew Jackson received his first command in:

- A. The regular U.S. army
- B. The Tennessee militia
- C. The Kentucky militia
- D. The U.S. Navy

- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. How did Jackson end up with a bullet in his arm?

- A. He accidentally shot himself.
- B. He was wounded in the Revolutionary War.
- C. He was shot in an argument over a duel.
- D. One of his men shot him.

4. Describe the South and its people as Jackson knew them in 1812.

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5. What important U.S. city sat by itself in the southern region? Why was it important?

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6. What problems arose from the mixture of people living in the southwestern region of the new United States?

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7. What was the Red Stick band and how was Andrew Jackson involved with it?

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8. Explain the origin of Jackson's nickname "Old Hickory."

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**Give an example of a nickname, either your own or someone else's. Describe how the name was acquired. Does it fit? Why or why not?**

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**Toughness is a quality prized by many. What might be some advantages of this quality? What might be the drawbacks of a character dominated by toughness?**

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